

Elusive ground-dwelling tropical forest bird species, long characterized as exceedingly rare, often prove to be reasonably common once their vocalizations have been recognized. Our observations at a reasonably well-watched locality suggest that Rusty-bellied Shortwing is probably greatly overlooked and at least locally common where its habitat requirements are met. As noted by Crosby (1996) ornithological coverage of the eastern Himalayas Endemic Bird Area is still very much in its infancy. Many parts of the region have always been difficult to access because of logistical and political reasons. It is hoped that, armed with the new information contained herein, and with the rapidly improving situation on visiting north-east India and Myanmar more people will try to seek out *Brachypteryx hyperythra* and other little known taxa in this exciting region.

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Iwein Mauro, Brouwerijstraat 29, B-9160 Lokeren, Belgium  
Edward Vercrusse, Wijzemanstraat 5, B-9000 Gent, Belgium

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# Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*: a new species for Thailand

IWEIN MAURO

On 7 January 1997 I was birding, together with Dominique Verbelen, along the exposed sandy banks of the Mekong river at Chiang Saen, Chiang Rai Province, Thailand, primarily in search of Long-billed Plover *Charadrius placidus*. Fairly large numbers of Little Ringed Plovers *Charadrius dubius* were present and my attention was soon drawn to an obviously larger plover associating with these. Unfortunately, this bird took to the wing before I even had a chance to take a good look at it. However, when doing so, it revealed a prominent broad wing-bar and repeatedly uttered a familiar soft, mellow *poo-ip*, and I immediately identified it as a Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*. I quickly informed DV and together we soon relocated the bird and obtained excellent views at close range, confirming my initial identification. After having observed the plover for about 15 minutes or so, we decided to inform others about its presence as we meanwhile realized this species was not treated in Boonsong and Round (1991). Shortly afterwards we returned to the spot, together with Raf Drijvers, and easily relocated the bird, now enabling sound recordings of the flight calls to be made. Jim

Chance saw the bird later that day and fortunately took the trouble to put the word out so that it was later seen by quite a few Thai birdwatchers. L. Bruce Kekule managed to obtain some good photographs of the bird on 17 January and on 28 January it was seen by Kant Ratanajun (P. D. Round *in litt.*). This represents the first record ever of Common Ringed Plover for Thailand.

Based on my own field notes made on 07 January 1997, slides taken by LBK on 17 January 1997 and sound recordings obtained by RD and DV on 07 January 1997, I compiled the following description.

**SIZE and STRUCTURE** A small-sized though robust, stocky *Charadrius* with rather large square head, short, straight, slightly stubby bill and relatively short, powerful legs. In direct comparison with Little Ringed Plover *C. dubius* appeared about 20% larger, proportionately shorter and thicker billed, shorter legged and noticeably more dumpy and pot-bellied with less attenuated rear-end. In flight showed noticeably longer wings and tail, resulting in more purposeful flight action. Primary projection short, encompassing about 20% of visible

terial length with two primary tips extending beyond longest tertial. Wingtip falling slightly beyond tail. Tail rounded.

**HEAD and NECK** Chin, throat and neck whitish, extending in obvious sharply defined collar over nape. Broad brownish chest-band washed with blackish, sharply demarcated and broadest in the centre of breast, gradually narrowing and less conspicuously continuing over lower nape. Forehead and lores pale off-white, merging above eye with obvious sharply demarcated broad supercilium reaching the end of the ear-coverts. Crown, ear-coverts and cheeks olive-brown with some blackish feathering becoming apparent on front. Eye-ring darkish.

**UPPERPARTS** Uniformly olive-brown.

**UNDERPARTS** Uniformly whitish.

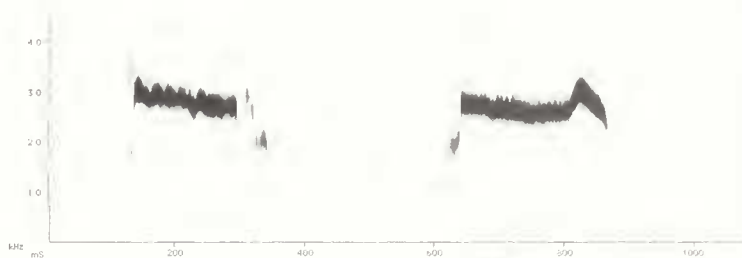
**WING** Conspicuous wing-bar, broadest between P8-5 and gradually narrowing inwards and continuing over the whole length of secondaries. Primaries dark brown. Secondaries a shade paler brown with buffish tips forming very inconspicuous trailing edge to inner arm. Hand generally uniformly dark brown. Upper wing coverts paler olive-brown fringed buffish, hence forming a pale panel on wing.

**TAIL** Generally olive-brown becoming darker towards tip, resulting in indistinct darker subterminal band, and gradually completely white laterally.

**MOULT and WEAR** Active body moult to first summer plumage with blackish feathering breaking through on front and throughout chest-band. Plumage generally moderately worn though buffish fringes still clearly visible on unmoulted juvenile upper wing-coverts.



**Plate 1.** Second calendar year Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*, 17 January 1997, Chiang Saen, Chiang Rai Province, Thailand (L. B. Kekule).



**Figure 1.** Sonagram of the calls of Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*, 07 January 1997, Chiang Saen, Chiang Rai Province, Thailand (R. Drijvers).

**BARE PARTS** Bill mostly black with small ill-defined yellowish orange area restricted to base of lower mandible. Legs and feet bright orange. Iris black.

**VOICE** Frequently uttered and highly distinctive; contact and alarm call can be transcribed as a soft, mellow disyllabic *poo-ip* or *too-lee*, with emphasis on the second note. When excited or repeatedly flushed a shortened and higher pitched monosyllabic *lee* was usually given (see Figure 1).

Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus*, which is not yet known from the Oriental region or Eastern Palearctic, though perhaps of likely future occurrence there, is the only species possibly confusable with Common Ringed Plover. Although the presence or absence of diagnostic toe webbing between the inner and middle toe could not be established with certainty in the field, this species can reliably be ruled out by a combination of chiefly voice, bill structure and prominence of wing-bar, as well as more subtle differences in general build and bare parts coloration, which all clearly point in favour of *C. hiaticula* (Cramp and Simmons 1983; Prater *et al.* 1977).

On the basis of the worn, retained juvenile upper wing-coverts the Chiang Saen plover can be aged as a second calendar year. During its lengthy stay this individual was progressing in active body moult to first summer plumage.

Two races of Common Ringed Plover are currently widely being recognized, though their relationships and distinguishing features still remain poorly understood. Nominate *hiaticula* occurs through much of north-west Europe from southern Scandinavia and the Baltic south to France and also Iceland, Spitzbergen, Greenland and the eastern coasts of Ellesmere and Baffin Islands in Canada, whereas *tundrae* inhabits the coast and tundra of Lapland and Russia (Cramp and Simmons 1983). Hence, on geographical grounds the Chiang Saen bird most likely belongs to *tundrae*, though due to the variability within both taxa no single feature conclusively allows subspecific identification.

This record constitutes the first for Thailand, although the species's addition to the Thai list comes as no surprise and it was listed as a likely candidate for future vagrancy by Boonsong and Round (1991). It is interesting to note that a better awareness among Thai birdwatchers of the species's potential occurrence and identification has already resulted in several subsequent records at the same locality. These are: one wintering from 29 December 1997 to at least 27 February 1998 (K. Sukhumalind and A. Pierce); two reported on 16

April 1998 (S. Tantitadapitak); and a single bird on 7 February 1999 (S. Tantitadapitak and S. Thongnakcokegruad; P. D. Round *in litt.*). Common Ringed Plover is a generally very rarely reported species throughout South-East Asia. In Myanmar it is known from a single observation of a group of four at Maungdaw, north Arakan in April 1944 (Smythies 1986). There are two records from Peninsular Malaysia: 25 March 1984, near Georgetown, Penang Island and 6 February 1988, Kuala Selangor (Wells 1999). However, the fact that the species occurs annually in Singapore, where an average of 1-4 individuals are reported per migration season, strongly suggests it is possibly greatly overlooked and almost certainly not as rare as the few records indicate.

I am most grateful to L. Bruce Kekule for readily allowing me to use his slides both to supplement the description and for publication. Many thanks also go to Raf Drijvers and Dominique Verbelen for providing sound recordings of the bird in question and for their excellent company together with Bram Demeulemeester when birding

*Izweïn Mauro, Brouwerijstraat 29, B-9160 Lokeren, Belgium*

Thailand in 1997. I am also much indebted to Serge Hoste for kindly preparing the sonagram and to Philip D. Round for providing new information on the occurrence of *Charadrius hiaticula* in Thailand. Finally, I would like to thank Jim Chance for generous hospitality at Chiang Saen Guest House and for taking the trouble to spread the news on the bird's presence hence allowing many resident Thai birdwatchers to make for the first time acquaintance with this throughout the Oriental region rarely encountered species.

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# Minahassa Owl *Tyto inexpectata* at Lore Lindu National Park, Sulawesi, Indonesia in December 1998

IWEIN MAURO and RAF DRIJVERS

On 16 December 1998 the authors observed and sound recorded Minahassa Owl *Tyto inexpectata* at about 1,700 m elevation in roadside primary lower montane forest near Danau (= Lake) Tambing, Lore Lindu National Park, north-central Sulawesi, Indonesia. It was initially picked up by its infrequently uttered, single hoarse, hissing shriek, typical of the genus, though strikingly different from that of Sulawesi Owl *T. rosenbergii*. In response to tape playback of its sound-recorded territorial call, the bird nearly immediately flew into the lower crown of a tall dead forest tree, where it perched immobile in the torch beam for about 10 minutes, providing excellent views down to about 50 m. Despite considerable efforts we failed to relocate the species during subsequent visits to the area. Our observation represents the second record for Lore Lindu National Park and the first documented definite field observation since 1939 of this virtually unknown species.

On the basis of field notes and sound recordings taken on 16 December 1998 we compiled the following description. A copy of the recordings resides at the British Library National Sound Archive, Wildlife Section, London.

**SIZE & STRUCTURE** A medium-sized, noticeably compact and stocky though otherwise typical *Tyto*,

featuring a relatively large, rounded head, a large well-defined heart-shaped facial disc, small eyes, a short and hooked bill, long rounded wings, short square tail and long, powerful legs with completely feathered tarsi and strong feet. Obviously much smaller (about one third), plumper, less attenuated and larger headed than Sulawesi Owl *T. rosenbergii* (not seen in direct comparison).

**HEAD & NECK** Large heart-shaped facial disc dark rusty brown, rather sharply demarcated by extensive dark blackish border, broadest below and on sides. Rest of head dark golden brown, extensively blotched blackish on the crown, which formed the darkest part of the head.

**UPPERPARTS** Uniformly dark golden brown.

**UNDERPARTS** Chest whitish. Breast, abdomen and flanks buffish, sparsely patterned with dark brown spots, especially obvious towards the centre of the belly. Feathering of tibia and tarsus and ventral area uniformly off-white.

**BARE PARTS** Upper mandible entirely yellowish. Feet brownish grey. Eyes black, glowing yellowish pink in the spotlight.